

Mary Margaret Bartelme

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Mary Margaret Bartelme played an important role in Illinois history. She championed the rights of children, especially those of young girls caught in the Illinois court system. She helped thousands during her lifetime, and even today her efforts continue to help minors.

Mary was born in Chicago in 1866, where she grew up and attended high school. After graduation, she taught in the Chicago public schools at the age of nineteen; however, she did not want to remain a teacher. Hence, in 1892 she returned to school. She initially considered going into medicine, but after meeting Myra Bradwell, a legal journalist, she changed her mind and applied to law school. Mary attended Northwestern Law School and was the only woman in her class. She excelled in law school, and when she wrote her thesis, *The Chicago Legal News* published it.

At the beginning of her legal career, Mary became interested in probate law. She began working for both the federal and Illinois Bar in June 1894. In 1897, after working at the Illinois Bar for three years, she became Public Guardian in Cook County at the recommendation of Judge Christian C. Kohlsaatt. She was the first woman to hold this position. In 1913, she became an assistant to Judge Merritt W. Pickney, and in 1920, she became an elected judge.

Mary advocated for children in the Illinois court system. She helped create juvenile courts in Illinois when she was a member of The Women's City Club, which

passed the Juvenile Court Act of 1899. These juvenile courts, the first in the United States, prevented children from being in close contact with possibly dangerous adults.

Mary also helped to create a court specifically for young women in 1913. She hired only females to work in it so the young women would feel more comfortable and be able to talk honestly about the reason or reasons for being involved in the court system. Mary Bartelme helped children outside of courtrooms as well. She established Mary Clubs, houses for young girls who were appearing in court. Many girls could not stay at home because they were abused by their parents. Initially, the first Mary Clubs were available only to girls who were white, but in 1921, Mary worked with the Friendly Big Sister's League to open a Mary Club for colored girls. In the first ten years that Mary Clubs existed, more than 2,600 girls stayed in them. Mary made sure these girls were provided with suitcases filled with clothes and toiletries.

In conclusion, Mary Bartelme helped many children during the years she served Cook County. Her dedication and hard work continue to help children in Illinois almost 100 years later. [From Bernadine Dohrn. Investigating the Rights of Youths. <http://www.abnet.org/publiced/youth/sia/youthrights/dohrn.html>. (Sept. 7, 2008); Maggie Hoag. Women in the Legal Profession. <http://womenslegalhistory.stanford.edu/papersC4/BartelmeMM-Hoag.pdf>. (Sept. 7, 2008); Marilyn Elizabeth Perry. Bartelme, Mary Margart. <http://www.anb.org/articles/11/11-0034.html?a=l&g=f&p=Illinois&ia=-at&b=bib&bs=Illinois&d=10&ss=8&9=119>. (Aug. 25, 2008); and Mary Margaret Bartelme. <http://www.stanford.edu/group/WLHP/articles/clnbartelme.htm>. (Sept. 7, 2008).]